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PRESIDENT BEGAYE JOINS UDALL IN FARM VISIT, ‘SHAMEFUL THAT NAVAJO FARMERS HAVE NOT BEEN REIMBURSED’



President Russell Begaye told Senator Tom Udall that it's shameful that Navajo farmers have not been reimbursed over a year after the Gold King Mine spill.

SHIPROCK N.M.-President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez joined U.S. Senator Tom Udall in visiting the farm of Earl and Cheryl Yazzie, noting that one year later the farmers have not been reimbursed for costs associated with the Gold King Mine contamination spill.

President Begaye and Vice President Nez both thanked Sen. Udall for his advocacy and lobbying efforts on behalf of Navajo farmers and their struggle to regain financial footing after the spill shut down many Navajo farms.

“It’s shameful that the farmers have not been reimbursed,” President Begaye said.

The president reminded the assembled group of elected leaders that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has held themselves accountable for the spill, yet they have done very little to reimburse the farmers.

“We have to keep reminding the U.S. EPA that under oath in two Senate hearings, they held themselves accountable for the spill,” President Begaye said. “However, after a year of non-payment to the farmers, we said enough is enough. We had to file suit against the EPA.”

Sen. Udall was instrumental in passing an amendment through the U.S. Senate on Sept. 15, urging prompt compensation, reimbursement to Tribal, state, and local governments, and ensuring long-term water quality monitoring.

Vice President Nez told Sen. Udall that the Nation appreciated his efforts in pushing this amendment. With the Obama Administration nearing the end of its tenure, Nez said that time is of the essence.

“We saw that the amendment passed the Senate but the House didn’t include it in their package. So, we hope there will be an op-



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portunity for a conference where it can be negotiated between both houses,” he said. “It is concerning. We need President Obama to tell the U.S. EPA to compensate the farmers.”

Udall noted that there would be conference and that the Democratic Party has the support of its house-side delegation to fight for this amendment and the included Senate provisions.

Beyond compensation to the farmers, President Begaye reinforced that the U.S. EPA needs to work with the Navajo Nation EPA and the U.S. EPA must assume responsibility for cleaning-up the San Juan river beds and setting up an onsite monitoring system.

“We are asking for an onsite monitoring system to be put in place

for the rivers and canals,” he said. “The solution is not to dilute the river with more water. They need to remove the contaminants from the river banks and beds.”

Before leaving, Sen. Udall thanked President Begaye and Vice President Nez for their unwavering advocacy to get Navajo farmers reimbursed.

“You’ve been incredibly strong,” Sen. Udall said. “We have worked closely together on this and we are going to continue to do this until we see that justice is brought to the situation.”

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